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RUNNING A LANGUAGE LABORATORY.

BY- REES, ALUN L.W.
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE TRUJILLO (PERU)

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THIS ARTICLE DESCRIBES THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF TRUJILLO AS IT IS USED IN THE FIVE-YEAR ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM. THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THIS COURSE ARE INTENSIVE, BASED ON A STUDY OF ENGLISH USING LADO-FRIES MATERIALS (FOR LATIN AMERICAN LEARNERS) WHICH REQUIRE FIVE HOURS OF CLASSWORK A WEEK SUPPLEMENTED BY FIVE HOURS IN THE LANGUAGE LAB. CLASSES ARE SCHEDULED BY THE HOUR WITH DIFFERENT MONITORS FOR THE VARIOUS GROUPS. A REGULAR 50-MINUTE SESSION BEGINS WITH A FREE CONVERSATION WARM-UP, AFTER WHICH BOOKS AND OTHER STUDENT PARAPHERNALIA ARE REMOVED BEFORE DRILLS BEGIN. A SHORT BREAK AFTER THE FIRST 25 MINUTES (FOR ROLL CALL) IS FOLLOWED BY A SHORT LANGUAGE GAME AND FURTHER DRILLS. THE FOUR-PHASE DRILLS (WHICH ACCOMPANY THE LADO-FRIES MATERIALS) OFFER A VARIETY OF ORAL WORK AND RANGE OF VOICES. STUDENTS ARE STRICTLY MONITORED BY A TEACHER LISTENING IN AND STRUCTURAL ERRORS AND CARELESS PRONUNCIATION ARE CORRECTED ON THE SPOT. MORE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS ARE NOTED ON SLIPS AND SENT TO THE CLASSROOM TEACHERS. A PRACTICAL DISCUSSION OF THE CARE AND CATALOGING OF THE TAPES CONCLUDES THE PAPER. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "LENGUAJE Y CIENCIAS," NUMBER 27, MARCH 1968, PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE TRUJILLO, IN TRUJILLO, PERU. (AMM)

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Alun L. W. Rees:

Running a Language Laboratory

A previous article in publication N°6 of 'Lenguaje y Ciencias' entitled: 'Como Hacer un Laboratorio de Idiomas', outlined the technical details of setting up our home-made installation in the Language Department of the National University of Trujillo. The present article enlarges upon this by describing how we have coped with the day to day running of the laboratory, in the hope that our experience may offer some profitable suggestions for teachers about to undertake laboratory work for the first time or even provide some new ideas for experienced operators.

Reference to the five-year scheme of study for prospective English teachers will show that for the two preliminary years the student is engaged upon an intensive study of English.[1] This is based on 'English Sentence Patterns' and 'English Pronunciation', both designed specifically for Latin-American learners by Lado and Fries of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Study of the former text demands five hours of classwork a week, supplemented by five hours in the language laboratory.

The object of the laboratory period is to reinforce classwork by improving aural comprehension and creating good language habits by means of oral responses to specially designed drills. As he enters for the first time, the new student's attention is drawn to the purpose of the two years of sustained laboratory work he is about to embark on, by a framed quotation hanging on the wall. This is translated for him, and reads: 'The single paramount fact about language-learning is that it concerns not problem-solving but the formation and performance of habits' [2] The two academic years of laboratory practice reinforce and form part of the groundwork for all further English studies in the Department. This aspect of the contribution of the language laboratory to

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ment of the National University of Trujillo. The present article enlarges upon this by describing how we have coped with the day to day running of the laboratory, in the hope that our experience may offer some profitable suggestions for teachers about to undertake laboratory work for the first time or even provide some new ideas for experienced operators.

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A time-table displayed at the door of the laboratory indicates that classes are scheduled by the hour, with different monitors for the various groups. Several periods are set aside each day to allow for any additional practice that may be requested by anindividual student, although, if there is a booth free, he may listen in to a programme of his

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choice while the others present are working over different material together. In practice, classes last for fifty minutes. Punctuality is insisted on despite the fact that the facility for individual work offe ed by the laboratory would permit students arriving late to begin pract ice without seriously disturbing those already occupied. The purpose o this is not only to ensure that each student makes full use of the time allocated to language practice but also because experience has repeated shown us that for optimum efficacy the class should never be allowed to lose its identity as a group. In other words, the individual members should be reminded from time to time by various means that they are functioning as part of a corporate body - beginning together, working over the same corpus of material, having a short break at the same time and in fact progressing together, though perhaps not at the same pace. This does not gainsay some of the benefits derived from any form of programmed instruction, that is of allowing the student to proceed at his own rate without being hampered in any way by the presence of other What it does point to is simply the need for a general awareness of coh esion which, while not interfering with individual work, adds that extr incentive by appealing to the gregarious instincts of the students and helps to offset the feeling of complete isolation that can so easily engender boredom from the essentially mechanical and repetitive nature of drill-work. Our attempt to counteract this without allowing the pen ulum to swing too far in the contrary direction so that the class degen erates into a mere facsimile of normal classwork with the textbook, wil become apparent in the succeeding details of daily routine.

Classes begin officially at ten minutes past the hour, though most students enter the laboratory earlier. Consequently, the monitor arriv es a few minutes before the hour to prepare the laboratory for operatio with the group of students in question. As they come in, the students remove their personal equipment - plastic resonator, hearing-tube, and crystal earphone - from the shelf where it is kept, and take up their positions in the booths. The teacher then engages those present in gen eral conversation in English.

Fortunately perhaps, the almost invariable climate of coastal Peru does not encourage resort to that old stand-by, the weather. However, there are a host of more suitable topics that hold the students' attent ion and entail a kind of loosening-up before the less spontaneous work is begun. Current films, new musical releases, local events, and perso al details of students' plans, likes and dislikes, seem to be the most

ofitable bases for sparking off free conversation.

When all students are present, and it is time to play over the drills, l books and odds-and-ends brought in by the students are collected and assed on the teacher's table. This measure is taken to prevent the mptation to refer covertly to the written text of the drills. Occasion-ly, during the course of the hour, the supervisor may momentarily leave e master-console and walk around the room to ensure that students are aning well into their booths, or to prevent the inveterate doodler or dget from effacing the walls of his booth with a pencil or other object t handed in at the beginning of the class. Notices such as: 'Do not cribble on the walls of your booth' pass unheeded once the student has tisfied his curiosity as to the meaning of the word 'scribble'. The st and obvious answer to this is to keep labo.ratory work interesting, einforced by occasional class-time inspection.

After the first twenty-five minutes there is an enforced break of bout four to seven minutes. Here a complete change of activity is intro-uced with the purpose of enlivening the class as a whole just when pro-onged repetition tends to have a noticeable wearying effect on the stud-nts. This shift of language activity takes the form of calling the roll, ollowed by a short language game.[3)]

A minimum attendance of seventy-five percent is compulsory, and extra xternal incentive to a regular appearance in the laboratory is provided y the fact that a good grasp of the drills covered is essential to pass nd-of-term oral examinations. Checking attendance consumes little time ecause the maximum capacity of the laboratory is twelve.

The language game, which varies every day, is drawn to a close after bout five minutes. In selecting or modifying a particular game to suit he needs of a particular group, it should be borne in mind that what ay appear puerile to the native speaker of English will often be quite cceptable to even the adult learner of the language who will be too en-rossed in the language aspect of the game to feel humiliated by its in-tellectual level. With suitable intervals the same game may be repeated gain and again without necessarily growing tedious, especially if sub-ected to slight variations. The whole point of the exercise is that

apart from supplying limited practice in English, it should involve the whole class in a unifying activity which serves as a stimulating break from the forty minutes of class time devoted to more routine work.

One could contend that two separate periods a day of twenty minutes each would be more effective in maintaining interest than the apparently disjointed procedure outlined above. However, as the University time-table for all subjects is formulated on the basis of teaching units of one hour, such a system would break into two such units instead of merely one as at present and consequently interfere with an already overloaded student time-table. Furthermore, the prospect of two visits to the language laboratory fivevdays,a week over a period of two years would be enough to daunt even the most highly motivated student, no matter how short the sessions might be.

The tape used for this particular laboratory course has been prepared by the staff of The English Language Institute, Ann Arbor, Michigan, to accompany the Lado and Fries written text. A large variety of oral work delivered by male and female voices incorporates substitution, transformation, response and directed discourse drills. These drills follow the four-stage pattern of stimulus/student response/correct response/student repetition of correct response.

To prevent the inevitable wear from regular use, we made our own copy of the master-tape by linking two tape-recorders. When the copy becomes worn we can easily furnish a new recording from the master-copy which has been safely stored away. On preparing the first such copy we decided to omit the final pause that allows for student repetition of the correct response, i.e. stage four, in the hope not so much of speeding up the programme as of preventing the lazy student from answering only after hearing the correct response given by the master voice. But subsequent experience has revealed that although effective in the latter aim, it created a serious drawback which persuaded us to re-introduce the original four-phase rhythm. For if the student has given an incorrect response he feels frustration at not being allowed to repeat it after the master-voice and tends to mumble it neverthless which interferes with accurate comprehension of the following cue.[4)] Student laziness is best combatted by instilling interest and enforcing rigorous and constant supervision. The four-phase drill naturally favours the slower student but even for those who consistently supply the correct response the

first time, there seems to be no harm in repeating it after the master-voice. After all, the object of the language laboratory is to aid in inculcating correct language habits, and in the learning of any skill repetition of activity is essential.

Laboratory and class work are closely co-ordinated. Every day the students go over at least twice each, often more, those drills first introduced and practised the previous day in class and partly written out as homework. Should class work - which is obviously slower because here the new material is presented for the first time - fall behind the laboratory practice, then this affords the opportunity for revision or additional work such as the learning of a poem or song, or for recording students' efforts to be filed for further reference.

Monitoring of student progress is strict. The teacher listens-in to individuals at random and makes all necessary comments in English over the microphone which can be switched on to any booth he may select. The aim of this supervision is, of course, not merely to correct mistakes - the repetition of the correct answer by the master-tape considerably reduces the need for this - but to keep the students on their toes by discouraging mumbling or mere mouthing of responses, idle chatting to neighbours, day-dreaming or doodling, all of which would stifle the effectiveness of any programme if allowed free rein. With this in mind, the conscientious monitor soon reforms the newcomer who might regard his hour in the laboratory as an hour of forced labour which can nevertheless be spent comfortably in passive and effortless listening.

When a student has a particular problem he simply raises his hand without disturbing the other members of the class in any way and the monitor listens-in to his booth immediately. More general difficulties may be dealt with by addressing the whole group simultaneously over the microphone, but for reasons which should be apparent from the earlier discussion, in this case we have found it more advantageous to stop the programme, request all the students to remove their headphones and to deal with them as a group as in the classroom. Occasionally the resolving of a problem may require the use of the blackboard, and this has been conveniently placed so that no student has to move from his seat or crane his neck to see what has been written up.

Structural errors, which are not numerous owing to the construction of the drills, can usually be corrected on the spot, as can careless slips in pronunciation. More fundamental pronunciation errors need more

thorough and systematic treatment. J.A. Roemmele maintains that, '... the difficulties in English which are endemic for a French or Spanish student must first be explained in class and only then can the monitor correct him by reminding him of the phonological explanations previously given'[5] This is true, and is the procedure we have adopted. Yet some of these problems are so deeply rooted through the interference of the mother tongue, e.g. with Spanish-speaking students the inability to hear and produce the difference between the phonemes /i/ and /i:/, the addition of the Spanish 'e' sound before the English 's' in initial position and the substitution of the trilled 'r' for the normal English 'r' sound that they easily lapse into their old habits. Merely pinpointing the difficulty over the microphone or referring to previous classwork, is not always an adequate remedy. These cases naturally call for further treatment which should always be at hand.

We have evolved a rather novel system of dealing with this. There is a close liaison between the laboratory supervisors and the pronunciation teacher. When the monitor detects a persistent pronunciation error by any one student, he fills out a form somewhat resembling a doctor's prescription. This states the student's name, year, group and details of the particular problem. The monitor adds the date and his own signature and hands it to the student after the class. The latter then makes an appointment with the pronunciation teacher who resolves the difficulty, first by ensuring student recognition of the sound or sound in question, followed by correct reproduction by means of additional drills, well-known techniques, e.g. the eliminating of the intrusive Spanish 'e' sound by prolonging the initial English 's' sound, and occasionally by reference to charts of the vocal organs. He subsequently signs the paper and the student returns it to his monitor in the language laboratory.

Apart from the attendance sheet, the daily record of drills covered and the periodic recording and filing of student performances, a further check is kept on progress. This takes the form of a file on each student which is filled in by each monitor at the end of every month for the groups under his supervision. This shows how the student is responding to laboratory work - and reminds the supervisor that he should be alert to it. A rather cramped version is reproduced on the next page.

LANGUAGE LABORATORY - MONTHLY REPORTS

Language: _ _____ Course: _____ Year of Study: ____

Surnames - IN BLOCK LETTERS: _____ Christian Names: _____

This record was initiated on the ____ of _____, 196 .

		April	May	June	July	Total %	August etc.
Attendance %	Class:						
	Lab:						
Response Frequency:							
Response Fluency:							
Pronunciation:							
Special Difficulties:							
Remarks:							
Teacher's Signature:							

Tapes are handled with great care. They are stored in a shelf in the master-console where they remain dry and free from dust, protected in their individual containers. To promote rapid reference we have devised a simple identification system for all the tapes in our collection. Those for English, French, German, Japanese, and assorted subjects are kept in separate compartments. On the edge of each reel container (a flat, cardboard box) a typewritten slip indicates the topic, serial number, and lessons included on the tape inside, e.g.

'English Sentence Patterns'
Tape 2 Lessons: 13-25

On opening the box it is found that no information is given on the plastic reel itself, for it often happens that a take-up reel becomes temporarily switched so that confusion would result. However, all relevant information is shown on a small typewritten sheet affixed to the inner wall of the box, e.g.

'English Sentence Patterns' - 2

GREEN - 1 13(1.1.) / 15(2.2.).
RED - 2 16(1.3.) / 19(1.1.)
GREEN - 3 19(2.1.) / 22(3.2.)
RED - 4 22(3.2.) / 25(3.1.)

The first item above would signify that, beginning with the green leade tape, and switched to track 1, the following lessons would be played ba lesson 13, part 1, drill number 1, to be followed by all those up to and including lesson 15, part 2, drill 2.

The leader-tapes are each about two and a half feet in length. Gre is invariably used to head tracks 1 and 3, and red for tracks 2 and 4. The above details, in abbreviated form are also written with ball-point pen on the appropriate leader-tapes as a safety measure against a tape being inadvertently separated from its correct container. For example, the green leader-tape in the above instance would be inscribed:

E.S.P. 2 Tr.1 13-15 / Tr.3 19-22

This precaution has rendered superfluous the prefacing of each tape wit a spoken identification.

It has become standard practice to return every tape to its conta

after use, with the green leader-tape uppermost. This may result in winding if one wishes to play tracks 3 or 4, both of which are always aded with red leader-tape, but orderliness is preferred to unfidiness the language laboratory.Our recorders permit the freeing of the tape om the magnetic-head slot when rewinding. The lessened friction not ly helps to speed up the process but also reduces additional wear.

The procedure so far described begs the question of how to locate lesson or drill that falls within the group defined by the commencing nd terminating lessons. How, for example, can one find lesson X1,part drill 2, without wasting time in trial and error? There was only one ractical solution to this problem: the tapes had to be played through ith reference to the written text so that a leaflet could be compiled hich would specify the exact location of any drill by indicating the espective number on the counter dial of the tape-recorder. This catal-guing had to be standardized by using the same tape-recorder and comm-ncing each track with a counter setting of 000. The result appears in eaflet form as in the following extract:

TAPE 1

Red leader-tape - Track 2

Lesson	Counter	Drill	Page
X1 Part 1	000	1a.1.	97
	033	1a.2.	97
	071	1b.1.	99
	090	2a.1.	100

The apparently painstaking task took no more than two free mornings or the course in question. It has paid dividends in the speed and ease t which any drill can be set ready for replaying, with a consequent ben-ficial effect on the wear and tear of equipment and teacher patience. uch a reference sheet also serves as a further check on the content of he various tapes.

The language laboratory has also been stocked with a variety of other language material by connecting the main tape-recorder either to a record-layer or to a subsidiary tape-recorder and thus copying tapes or records n loan. By this means our sound library in English now embodies such varied recordings as lectures given abroad, professional poetry readings, and dialogues, a small collection of British and American songs, both traditional and modern, speeches by Churchill, a series of talks on

teaching English in difficult circumstances, given by Dr. West and originally broadcast by the B.B.C., and so on. We have also produced our own recordings tailored to the needs of particular classes. These include programming for the teaching of facts, recordings of short samples of Old English, stories, pronunciation drills. Also, before guests sign our Visitors' Book, they are invited to listen-in to a tape in either English or Spanish, entitled: "Visitors' Introduction to the Language Laboratory. This opens with some information about the setting-up of the laboratory, followed by a brief explanation of its purpose and function, illustrated by a recorded sample of a student at work.

For recordings made off the premises, for example of demonstration English classes given in local schools (used in the Methodology course), a portable tape-recorder is employed. To maintain the quality of sound reproduction of our equipment a series of sound contrasts have been recorded to be played from time to time to different native speakers of English to ensure that the sounds are being clearly reproduced. Contrasts are given between the following fricatives in both initial and final positions: /θ/ - /s/, /θ/ - /f/, /s/ - /f/.

All tapes in English recorded by us are normally spoken by natives - either British or American - and delivered at just a little slower than ordinary conversation speed. Unlike music, they are taped at low velocity. Three helpful aids to producing better recordings that might be passed on to the reader approaching laboratory work for the first time, are the following: the microphone should be placed on an object clear of extraneous vibrations from the tape-recorder or speaker, otherwise the recording will we permeated with a continuous humming; the microphone should be placed about thirty centimetres from, and almost side-on to the speaker to prevent his breath from producing the characteristic hissing sound that tends to be interspersed throughout amateur recordings; prepared scripts, which are essential, should be inserted in a transparent plastic folder to avoidrustling being recorded, and filed for reference after use.

We are currently working on two projects. The first is the preparation of an orientation tape in Spanish for new students, explaining the value of laboratory work, its procedure, and the need for conscientiousness. The second, and more laborious, is the formulation of appropriate scripts to accompany the showing of selected slides. The language laboratory has a permanent screen on the wall opposite the master-consol

the showing of slides co-ordinated with a master-voice. We have not, yet, explored the possibilities of teaching the reading or writing lls, or of using the laboratory for any form of objective testing, ugh attention may be turned to these in the future.

All aspects of laboratory work are under the supervision of the tea- er officially appointed head of the language laboratory. His duties are rious and onerous and of great importance to the smooth running of the tallation. Besides administration and conducting classes himself, he to handle all the minor details that could seriously interrupt the fectiveness of the laboratory. Thus he checks equipment frequently, es running repairs, such as the splicing of broken tapes and minor justments to the tape-recorders. Breakdowns of a more serious nature n usually be attended to by a local dealer, for the simplicity of our uipment results in delays only when an important part of a machine has be replaced. The head of the laboratory is also responsible for keep- g up to date an inventory of equipment that lists all items down to the allest spare screw.

It is a truism that the value of the language laboratory depends on the overall quality of the recorded programme. With the present oliferation of laboratories, often as ends in themselves, one may add e caution that the utility of any programme depends in turn and in large rt on the monitor's ability to instil and maintain interest. We hope at this comprehensive survey of the functioning of our own installation s shown that although the language laboratory may be a labour-saving vice, this does not entail that the teacher's role degenerates to that a mere machine minder. On the other hand, by freeing the teacher from e physical task of conducting groups in drill work, he is given scope exercise his initiative and skill in new directions.

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Universidad Nacional de Trujillo
Depto. de Idiomas y Lingüística
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Co-editor: Juan B. Vanriest
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